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SUBJECT: Ambassador Meets with OAS Representatives on June 28 Poll

Ref: Tegucigalpa 489 and previous

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On June 18, The Ambassador met with representatives of the Organization of American States (OAS), which had just announced acceptance of a Honduran government request to send monitors for the June 28 poll (reftel), despite a Honduran court ruling that the poll was illegal. OAS representatives justified their monitoring of the poll by saying that it would keep the OAS part of the dialogue rather than relegated to the sidelines. The OAS announcement caught the Embassy by surprise and has been used by the government to justify the poll. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador, accompanied by USAIDOFF, met with representatives of the OAS, including Raul Alconada (Chief of Mission for the Electoral Observer Mission for the November 2008 primaries), Pablo Gutierrez (Director of OAS Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation), and Jorge Miranda (in-country OAS chief) to discuss OAS' monitoring of a June 28 poll, called by President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya to seek support for a November referendum to call for a constituent assembly. The Ambassador explained the full history behind the June 28 poll, including the two court rulings against the President's initiative and the precarious positions of some of the country's institutions, most notably the Honduran Armed Forces, who have found themselves caught between presidential orders to support the poll and a court order not to do so.

¶3. (SBU) Gutierrez confirmed that OAS General Secretary Jose Miguel Insulza had responded positively in a letter dated June 16 to the request of Honduran Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas to dispatch an observer mission for the June 28 poll. Alconada and Gutierrez emphasized that they had told Minister Rodas that the purpose of the OAS mission was to monitor political developments in Honduras, and that it would not/not be an election observer mission.

¶4. (SBU) Alconada and Gutierrez justified the OAS decision by explaining that they would be more able to engage in political discussions after the poll and keep the President to his word to respect the final authority of the Congress to authorize (or not) the November referendum. Alconada said that he told the Foreign Minister and the Secretary of the Presidency, Eduardo Enrique Reina, that the Congressional authority was clear, and that it was the

understanding of the OAS that the June 28 poll was not/not electoral in nature, had shaky legal standing, and would produce a non-binding result. Still, Alconada and Gutierrez expressed concern about the precarious position of the Honduran Armed Forces. The Ambassador and the OAS representatives agreed to remain in touch and exchange information periodically.

¶5. (U) The Honduran Congress voted June 23 to ask the OAS to withdraw its offer to send a mission, citing the court ruling that the poll was illegal.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The OAS announcement of a mission caught us by surprise, with President Zelaya informing the Ambassador during a meeting with other high-level Honduran politicians. Though the OAS has offered only an "accompanying," not observing, mission, this nuance has been largely lost here, with the Presidency and Ministry of Foreign Affairs using the OAS response and current presence as evidence of the poll's legitimacy.

Llorens